Caller Timing and Wordcraft

Rick Mohr, November 2015

Calling 101

- A standard dance tune sets up a framework of 64 beats (4 parts x 2 phrases/part x 8 beats/phrase).
- Know precisely how your dance fits that framework—exactly when does each figure start and end?
- Time each call to end on the beat before the figure starts.
- For 8-beat figures use 4-beat calls (start on beat 5, end on beat 8)
- As the dancers learn the dance, gradually shift to 2-beat calls and omitted calls

Planning your calls

- It can be very useful to make a complete plan of what words you'll say and when
  - for beginning callers with any dance
  - for experienced callers with a tricky dance
- Make copies of the blank timing sheet.
- Write each figure in the boxes, indicating how long it takes.
- Plan calls, giving useful information at just the right time
- Write calls below the beats, underlining stressed syllables.
- Put on the music and practice!
- Now try it without looking at the page!

Choosing the words

- For each call you have to say what to do, whom to do it with, and often a direction or hand. What order should you pick? There might be as many as 24 choices!
  - "Allemande left your neighbor 1½"
  - "1½ allemande left your neighbor"
  - "Neighbor left allemande 1½"
- As a rule of thumb try this order:
  - Who, then hand or direction, then what, then how much.
  - Examples:
    - "Left allemande" instead of "allemande left"
    - "Right hand star" instead of "star by the right"
- Often the "how much" is best said once they're doing it. Example:
  - "With your neighbor left allemande ... go once and a half"
- For a tricky sequence it can be time-consuming to figure out exactly the right words, but getting it right can make all the difference.

Miscellaneous

- Be the vocalist! Use voice inflection, syncopation, etc. to make it sound interesting.
- Learn how long the standard figures take.
- A reel has 4 notes per beat (Mississippi Mississippi).
- A jig has 3 notes per beat (Jiggity jiggity jig).